

Ellis found a meter that still had an hour on it and parked the Buick. Then, from under his seat, he pulled two potatoes. "But not to worry about your deficiency, my man," he said as he did a one-handed juggle with the two tubers. "I got us something to enhance our appeal."

Clete and Ellis set up camp: beach umbrella, beer cooler, lawn chairs, Cheetos, beach towels. And then, potatoes in place, they strutted for the ladies.

Ellis: stout and rotund and covered, front and back, with a pelt of curly black hair, his swimming trunks a skinny green strip under the globe of his belly. Clete: stick-thin and pot-bellied and hunch-shouldered, zinc oxide painted across his nose and cheeks like war paint, his Speedo pulled up to the equator of his paunch. And both of the men hung — albeit lumpily — like two stud gorillas.

After twenty minutes of advertising — stopping and posing for all the sun-bathing beauties in the vicinity, Ellis said, "Why don't we go take a dip and let the ladies fight for us here while we're gone. I swear to God, these bitches are droolin'."

"Did ya see the blonde smile at me, Ellis?" Clete sputtered. "The woman wants me; I can tell."

Two days earlier, a hurricane had boiled up off the coast of Peru. The resulting swells that rolled into California and culminated in crashing, churning, ten-foot breakers, tossed and turned Clete and Ellis like they were in a washing machine, sending the potatoes from front to back, around to the front again, and then back to the rear. Ellis' tuber lodged in the upper anterior quadrant of his left buttock, looking like a hard, irregular, ready-to-burst tumor that jiggled slightly as he strolled out of the water. Clete's rolled down south and stopped dead center to hang under the anus — a trapped bowel movement, solid and hard and heavy. The women on the beach, who had snickered and giggled as the guys showed off their equipment originally, laughed right out loud as the boys returned to base camp from the water, and they howled and screamed like chimpanzees when Ellis discovered the displacement of his prosthesis and — in a panicked rush, his fingers dancing like the tentacles of two electrocuted octopi — worked his potato back around to front and center.

#### THE BUDGET CUT

The budget cuts bumped Ellis Leahy out of his low-stress job and put him on the dole for six months. Then the dole went dry and Ellis went — reluctantly, and as a last



resort — into Burger 'N' Run's assistant manager training program....

Mr. Leahy, assistant manager, stood between the deep fryers and the grill, his too-tight collar digging into his fleshy red neck. Sweat beads the size of bullets rolled down his high forehead and off his brow to splash down on the greasy floor. It was a full-on rush: onion rings, fries and burgers sizzled, the car-port bell chimed, timers for the various food items beeped to tell the employees, "The product is cooked; remove me from the deep fryer/grill," employees darted forward and aft, port and starboard, in an oddly synchronized dance, and Ellis stood frozed, wide-eyed, sweating, "... with his fat head up his ass," according to the crew he was in charge of.

"Get outa my way, you dork," said Amber — a small and cute as a bug sixteen year old — to her boss, Ellis. She pushed him aside and pulled up a basket of burned-to-a-crisp fries. "What a dufus. Didn't you hear the timer?" she said to him, and then to no one in particular, "Where the hell do they find these assistant managers, anyway?" Rafael, over on the grill, chuckled as he threw five more poker-chip burger patties onto the grill. Theresa, on the car-port, snorted out a little laugh as the car-port bell chimed again. "Why don't you just get outa my way, man. Go back to your office, huh!" Amber barked at Ellis. So he did. He slumped in his office chair in front of his desk and loosened his tie. The ticker was going a mile a minute and his head felt as if it would explode as the blood pressure shot through the roof.

The rush tapered down and Amber's mouth shifted from third to fourth gear. According to her, that old dude (Ellis) ought to be drooling in his rocking chair in some retirement home, should take his bald head and fat butt on out of this place and get a job he can handle, should just fucking find a corner to die in....

Ellis placed his hands on her small waist and lifted her, easily, surprisingly easily — she couldn't have weighed more than eighty pounds — up over his head into the fog of cooking grease that hovered down from the ceiling. She screamed and stiffened, then began a wriggling struggle as he carried her to the front of the kitchen. He sat her down ("Let me go, you motherfucker.") at the counter at the car-port window, planted his fist in the middle of her belly and gave her a slow but firm push. Her designer jean uniform slid easily over the stainless steel, and the top of the frame of the open car-port window caught her high on the back and forced her to bend over so she was folded in the middle with her chest on her thighs. He pushed her shoulders until her neck was under the top of the window frame and her butt was hanging out into the car-port.



"You motherfucker," she hissed.

The car-port bell chimed. Through the speaker a male voice said, "I'll take one a those there in the window."

Ellis put one hand on Amber's hat and another on the bottoms of her shoes and gave her a final push. When her neck cleared the window, she unfolded, snapping out straight, and slid head-first into the open window of the car that had just pulled up. Ellis leaned on the counter and called out, "That'll be twelve ninety-five, guy; ya want some fries to go with that?" The driver said, "Nope," handed Ellis a twenty and drove away without his change.

### THE THIRD NIGHT ON THE JOB (BYE-YA)

Ellis Leahy, night manager, sat at his desk in the office in the back and counted the money while his crew scoured the grill and strained the deep fryers and wiped the counters and mopped the floor. Then Kim appeared in the doorway, her thick black hair let loose from her cap, a fine sheen of sweat and cooking grease shining on her face. "We're all done, Mr. Night Manager Sir," she sing-songed. "Can we go?"

Ellis turned from his stacks of fives and tens and twenties to look at her. She was nineteen years old, dark-haired, dark-eyed, plump and beautiful. She reminded him of his wife Ruth when Ruth was a girl. Kim saw the appreciation of her beauty in his eyes and plopped down in his lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and said, "Place is all clean, boss." Then she grabbed the hair on the back of his head with one hand and ground her lips into his so hard that their teeth — her teeth, his partial — clashed. When she released him he stood to dump her off his lap and growled, "Get the hell outa here," wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Her eyes darted to his crotch and the bulge of the incipient erection and she smiled and said, "Bye-ya."

Ellis sat back down and rubbed his eyes as the crew jostled out the back door. When they were gone, the place silent, he pulled the bank deposit bag from the desk drawer and began paper-clipping the like denomination bills together, and he noticed that the twenties were gone.

### IN THE WEE SMALL HOURS

Ellis Leahy wrote down Kim Rubio's address from her employee file and locked the restaurant and hopped into his